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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: social integration

Submitted by the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, UNANIMA International and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Achieving social integration — meaningful work, social protection and social housing

1. The fourth commitment made at the World Summit for Social Development was to promote social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and the participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.

2. Three profound social problems were identified: poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. It was noted in Copenhagen that these problems affected every country. The task identified was to address both their underlying and structural causes and their distressing consequences in order to reduce uncertainty and insecurity in the people's lives.

3. Experience shows that an awareness of these problems has been created and that some good practices have been established, although there are major public policy challenges facing society concerning the underlying structural causes and their distressing consequences. Our global interconnectedness has brought us to the point where the choices we make now will have a profound impact on the future of humanity.

4. The dominant economic model has failed. The model was premised on economic growth as an end in itself and in the service of the powerful. Inherent in this model was a belief in the trickle down effect and that "the rising tide would lift all boats". The economic crises as well as other major global challenges regarding food, water, energy and climate change are a wake-up call to articulate a shared vision, a socially inclusive global society based on the promotion and protection of all human rights. A new financial architecture with major redistribution of resources and power is required to achieve the vision of Copenhagen for an integrated society.

5. The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd is an international non-governmental organization of 4,000 sisters working in 72 countries. We see that the people who benefited the least from the economic model are the very people who are suffering the most from its failure. As an organization working in particular with women and children, we see first-hand the gender aspect of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion where the dominant causes are discrimination and lack of enforced rights.

6. Our vision of the future is a society that is socially just. Such a society would be grounded in the values of human dignity and human rights, including responsibilities, as well as solidarity that leads to social integration and a just society for all. This requires that individuals, families, communities and nations look through the lens of social justice and undertake decision-making that will transform our world. The lens is one of right not might. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and its commitment to social integration demands that we prioritize human dignity, human rights, solidarity and social inclusion. What is required now is that Member States commit to these same values in action.

7. While our vision for the future may be desirable, one may ask if it is achievable. Our experience says, yes! We discuss here three areas of activity that foster a socially inclusive society and make it a reality: meaningful work, social protection and social housing.

Meaningful work

8. We prefer to use the term meaningful work rather than employment. We do so because all work is not necessarily meaningful and not all meaningful work is paid employment, for example, work in the home and voluntary work in the community. We also recognize while paid employment is very desirable, unemployment and lack of access to paid work is a reality for many.

9. We have established many skills-training and microfinancing projects for individuals and groups, especially women, who live in extreme poverty. Some projects have a local market focus, others look to international markets. This is where our international network is able to promote and market products through such organizations as Handcrafting Justice, Sharing Fair and the Good Shepherd Trading Circle.[1] Global inclusion is experienced through these relational networks between people in developing and developed countries. This is based on recognition of skills, respect for diversity and builds economic solidarity.

10. By supporting these initiatives, women have an experience of dignified work, adequate income to support their families and work in environments that are safe and people-centred. Through skills development and informal education these women become motivators for change within the family and the local community. They move from positions of exclusion to inclusion and become the bedrock of local communities that are safe, secure and just.

Social protection

11. In the context of meaningful work, we recognize that many people are unemployed and that others are engaged in unremunerated work. For these reasons we strongly support the idea of a basic or minimum income. Our organization supports the concept as a feasible alternative approach to creating a more just, inclusive and socially cohesive society. We note the discussion of this concept in the United Nations publication *World Economic and Social Survey 2008 — Overcoming Economic Insecurity*. A basic income system would create a platform for meaningful work. It would benefit paid employment, as well as other forms of work. There are many reasons to introduce basic income: (a) it ensures that everyone receives at least a minimum level of income; (b) it alleviates poverty and unemployment; (c) it ensures gender equality; (d) it gives value to unpaid work, such as home duties and caring; and (e) it faces up to the changes in the global economy. In sum, it is a powerful and effective force for social inclusion.[2]

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[1] See http://www.goodshepherdsisters.com/; http://www.handcraftingjustice.cedris.org/; http://www.goodshepherdsistersgb.org/; http://www.thetradingcircle.com.au/.

[2] *Socio-Economic Review 2007: Addressing Inequality. Policies to Ensure Economic Development, Social Equity and Sustainability* (Dublin, CORI Justice Commission, 2007).

Social housing

12. Having a safe home with security of tenure is an important aspect of social integration. The need for accommodation is deemed a basic human need.[3] There is a close connection between housing policy and other social policies, such as employment. One concrete example would be the practical difficulties in keeping a job while experiencing homelessness or sustaining accommodation while unemployed.[4] There is a clear link in addressing housing need with economic and social development.

13. If housing were to be regarded as providing a home, and not just as a market commodity, it would be clearly understood as a social good like education and public health.

14. In Ireland, for example, our organization provides sheltered housing projects for older people and emergency accommodation to homeless women and children. Believing in the dignity of each person, our organization strives to provide quality care tailored to meet the needs of individuals and families so that they can live in a safe and nurturing environment. Family support education and training is also provided. These projects are inserted in the local community providing those who benefit with an experience of social integration. We collaborate with other local organizations to advance the social housing agenda.[5]

Recommendations

15. We are at an extraordinary moment in history. Abandoning the vision of Copenhagen is not an option. To build a more just and socially cohesive society we recommend that Member States:

(a) Adopt and implement socio-economic and human rights-based policy measures and legal instruments that foster an inclusive society. Alongside rights are responsibilities: individuals have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of society and society has a duty to permit their full participation;

(b) Prioritize and provide social housing and maximize the benefits for people who are socially excluded by ensuring that social inclusion policies are synchronized across all government departments;

(c) Implement adult informal education sessions and skills training as these foster social inclusion, build attitudes of tolerance and non-discrimination and provide equality of opportunity and outcome;

(d) Establish basic social protection schemes for both formal and informal economies which serve to ensure greater equality, inclusion, stability and cohesion in society.

[3] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Fact Sheet No. 21, *The Human Right to Adequate Housing*, available at http://www.ohchr.org.

[4] See David Silke, "Housing Policy", in *Contemporary Irish Social Policy*, Suzanne Quin and others ed. (Dublin: UCD Press, 2005).

[5] http://www.corksocialhousingforum.com/.